

## **Everglades Restoration: Outreach and Education Needs in the Florida Keys**

by Alex Score, UF/IFAS/FL Sea Grant

For the past few months, a group of us have been trying to draw more attention to Monroe County and the downstream effects from Everglades restoration. We have found that just as Keys residents sometimes tune out what happens on the mainland, Monroe County sometimes gets overlooked as a site for Everglades Restoration meetings. As part of our efforts, we recently helped the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACoE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) hold one of five meetings dealing with outreach about the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) here in the Keys.

The workshop titled “Everglades Restoration: Updating the Strategy for Outreach” was held in early August. Selected Monroe County residents were invited to help the USACoE and the SFWMD update their outreach plan. Approximately 25 people participated in the two facilitated sessions held at the Marathon Garden Club.

During the workshop, we were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach products created and distributed by the USACoE and the SFWMD. It turned out that very few people had ever seen any of these products, and many participants were uncertain about CERP. In short, there was an obvious gap in CERP outreach for the Keys compared to what had been established in the “upstream” counties. In reality, the CERP Outreach Program is still in its infancy, and Monroe County residents need to show they are interested and involved if they want to be an integral part of this huge undertaking.

### **Outreach partnership campaign**

The good news is that opportunities are coming soon. Recently, the SFWMD signed off on funding for a “Florida Keys CERP Outreach Partnership.” This partnership will conduct a three-year campaign dealing with CERP, ecosystem restoration, and water conservation issues specific to the Florida Keys. Currently, the partnership comprises the SFWMD, Florida Sea Grant, University of Florida and Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Cooperative Extension Program, Florida Keys Community College, Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority, Everglades National Park, and three National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) organizations in South Florida; the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

The goals of the Florida Keys Outreach Partnership are to: 1) integrate CERP, water quality and water conservation messages into existing local education and outreach programs, 2) present peer-reviewed science in a form that people can understand, 3) promote local ownership of existing and future environmental challenges, and 4) leverage off existing resources, networks and activities to target key segments of the public, including K–12 teachers, decision-makers, business leaders, and tourists.

### **Summits will gather public input**

As a first step, we want to gather public input on education and outreach needs in the Florida Keys. To do this, we will hold three Keys Ecosystem Restoration Summits. In particular, we want to assess existing outreach and education work dealing with South Florida ecosystem restoration and CERP, identify gaps within the Florida Keys and beyond, set priorities for

efforts to fill key gaps, and discuss pooling of resources to support priority projects. Through participation in the Keys Ecosystem Restoration Summits, you can help the Florida Keys CERP Outreach Partnership create and implement projects that specifically address the needs of Monroe County.

The Keys Ecosystem Restoration Summits are open to everyone. We believe this is a great opportunity, and we need your support to make it a success.

**Keys Ecosystem Restoration Summits:**

Wed. **October 22**: Marathon Library, from 9-12, 3251 Overseas Hwy

Thursday, **October 23**: Key West Library 9-12, 700 Fleming St

Friday, **October 24**: Islamorada Library 9-12, MM 81.5 (Bayside)

For more information, contact Alex Score, Education and Outreach Coordinator, South Florida Ecosystem Education Project, University of Florida – Sea Grant Extension, PO Box 1083, Key Largo, FL 33037, 305-852-7717 ext 23, [afscore@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:afscore@ifas.ufl.edu).